From:	Josh Hantman <hantman.joshua@gmail.com>
To:	ehud barak <ehbarak1@gmail.com>
CC:	
Date:	Sun, 5/19/2013 8:39:47 PM
Subject:	Re: גרסה מעודכנת

0544848438

ב-May 19, 2013, 18:57 בשעה, ehud barak <ehbarak1@gmail.com> כתב/ה:

> Your mobile number please. Ehud
>
> Sent from my iPhone
>
> On May 19, 2013, at 18:00, Joshua Hantman <hantman.joshua@gmail.com> wrote:
>
> # The Kremlin holds the Keys
>
> The unfolding tragedy in Syria has already taken over 75,000 lives. Recently, the world has witnessed the use of nerve agents by the Assad regime, as well as videotaped executions and even cannibalism in the 'name of God' on behalf of the rebels. I often refer to our "tough neighborhood" here in the Middle East. But when does *tough* become simply intolerable? With lives lost and red lines crossed there is still no coordinated plan to end this truly unendurable situation.
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> Beyond the excruciating human suffering, three main risks are embedded in the current state of affairs: Firstly, the regular spilling of blood in an area where the blood feud is a cultural norm is a recipe for cyclical, intractable conflict. Syria has became a magnet for extremist groups complicating any efforts to end the violence and increasing the odds of post-Assad Syria winding up as a failed state; a new Lebanon at best, a Somalia at worst.
>
> Secondly, the possibility of intensified chemical weapons abuse grows with every round which is fired. For the regime, the psychological thresholds and impact of potential external deterrence are diminishing. And with each escalation, the prospect of chemical weapons falling into terrorists' hands increases. Such a scenario would transform an internal civil war (albeit with external meddlers) deteriorating into a much wider regional conflict. Syrian attempts to transfer such advanced weapon systems to Hezbollah in Lebanon, for example, will be blocked. The world knows that Israel does not bluff regarding its red lines.

Thirdly, the time, diplomatic energy and resources being invested to deal with the Syrian crisis could detract leaders from tackling the Iranian military nuclear program, which in the long term is far more dangerous.

Today, Assad's armed army is weaker than ever. More than one player on the world stage, or even in the region, has the ability to destroy his air force and air defenses within a relatively short timeframe. But that won't necessarily end the fighting or secure the chemical weapons arsenal. When one considers the alternatives which have been raised such as no fly zones imposed by the U.S., NATO or Turkish forces, separately or combined; a *cordon sanitaire* for refugees along the Turkish and Jordanian borders; as well as external attacks on the chemical weapons capabilities, I feel that at this stage all options should remain on the table.

It could be argued that had a different set of timely decisions been taken we would already have won the case over Assad. But that no longer matters. We live in the present, and the *current* situation demands immediate solutions. It is time for a genuine strategic recalibration which takes into consideration that the key to the most painless path to ending this bloodshed will be found in Moscow.

The Kremlin has at its disposal the leverages that can convince Assad to leave, or at least to cease fighting as a first step. The Russian leaders fully understand that Assad is doomed. They can see that he has lost his legitimacy. It is not, however, hard to asses why they are reluctant to say it loudly at this stage. If we want to see an end to the fighting, if we do not want to see *Jabhat al Nusra* or the likes conducting years of bloody massacres of Alawites and others in a "no man's land" Syria, then we need Russia to lead the international effort to end it; with all the other players playing a supporting role. In a way, it should be a mirror image of what happened in Libya, where Russia was asked to support an effort led by the Europeans and backed by the US.

The Kremlin, for more than forty years, invested a lot of political capital, financial resources and prestige in the Assad dynasty. They still do. Their readiness to keep their commitment to give him S300 surface to air missiles and improved radars for the *Yakhont* shore to sea missiles system is worrying. In the past, they have trained and equipped the Syrian army, and provided intelligence gathering capabilities. They know the generals of the chemical weapons units on a first name basis. They perceive the naval outposts in Tartous and Latakia as strategically important for them. They want to protect these assets, and we – the West

– must be realistic with our demands. The challenge cannot be to 'educate' Russia. It is simply impractical.

The immediate challenge therefore is to put an end to the incessant bloodbath in Syria. A mutually agreed special role for Russia in a post Assad Syria which includes naval rights in the aforementioned ports could be the *least bad* option; bearing in mind the alternatives. We can always resort to 'tougher' choices should this one fail.

The Russians are short of perfect as all of us sometimes are. But they are an important world power with particular weight in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and the Caucasus. They have their own interests and perspectives that must be taken into account on a par with those of all the other players. There will be a price for their readiness to lead; a price that must be pre-negotiated.

Putin demonstrated both leadership and responsibility when it came to the issue of advanced air defense systems to Iran. And as of now, Syria is still several months from potentially having operational S300 missiles. It is also important to highlight that however modern and effective these systems are, they are certainly *not* invincible.

Give Russia the opportunity to lead and succeed in such an effort, and it could help shape not only the future of Syria, but also soften Russian attitudes towards cooperation on the world stage regarding other prickly global issues.

It appears that Secretary Kerry's trip to Russia did not yet yield this result. The visit, however, has demonstrated the sincerity of the Secretary and the Administration in exhausting all alternatives before turning to tougher choices.

I am confident of the need to try again. This is not a zero-sum game. Our attempts must, of course, be open minded and self-confident, not from a position of weakness but rather based on an astute understanding of the huge toll which failure will reap. No one can assure success. But for the sake of Syria– and the region as a whole – we must keep trying.